



Risk communication, public engagement, and climate change: A role for emotions

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Abstract:

This article discusses the potential role that emotions might play in enticing a lifestyle that diminishes climate change. Climate change is an important challenge for society. There is a growing consensus that climate change is due to our behavior, but few people are willing to significantly adapt their lifestyle. Empirical studies show that people lack a sense of urgency: they experience climate change as a problem that affects people in distant places and in a far future. Several scholars have claimed that emotions might be a necessary tool in communication about climate change. This article sketches a theoretical framework that supports this hypothesis, drawing on insights from the ethics of risk and the philosophy of emotions. It has been shown by various scholars that emotions are important determinants in risk perception. However, emotions are generally considered to be irrational states and are hence excluded from communication and political decision making about risky technologies and climate change, or they are used instrumentally to create support for a position. However, the literature on the ethics of risk shows that the dominant, technocratic approach to risk misses the normative-ethical dimension that is inherent to decisions about acceptable risk. Emotion research shows that emotions are necessary for practical and moral decision making. These insights can be applied to communication about climate change. Emotions are necessary for understanding the moral impact of the risks of climate change, and they also paradigmatically provide for motivation. Emotions might be the missing link in effective communication about climate change.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Public

Exposure :

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Unspecified Exposure

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Global or Unspecified

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Health Outcome Unspecified

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified